

Washington

Taylor Farms buys slice of Crunch Pak

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

CASHMERE, Wash. — A major California fresh produce company, Taylor Farms of Salinas, is becoming a partner in Crunch Pak of Cashmere, the national leader in fresh, sliced-apple snacks.

The two companies have entered into agreements aimed at Taylor Farms purchasing “a significant minority stake” in Crunch Pak, according to a news release issued by both companies.

The deal gives Crunch Pak regional distribution to retail and food service customers nationwide that it needs for faster distribution to stay competitive and gives Taylor Farms an entry into fresh fruit slicing technology.

Dovex Fruit Co., Wenatchee, will retain majority ownership of Crunch Pak and provide Taylor Farms with direct access to



Workers sort for defects in apple slices at Crunch Pak in Cashmere, Wash., in 2010. Crunch Pak is the leading producer nationally of apple slices for the retail market. It supplies many grocery stores and fast food restaurants.

organic and conventional fruit, the news release states.

Crunch Pak sales, marketing and management teams will remain and Bruce Taylor, Taylor Farms CEO, will join Crunch Pak’s board of directors.

“The fresh cut industry is rapidly changing. Customers are requiring deliveries sev-

en days a week. You have to be national but with regional delivery across the country,” said Mauro Felizia, Crunch Pak president. “We bring our leading edge technology in slicing the best quality fruit to the table, but we need distribution faster to market.”

Logistics, innovation and collaboration are important

and Taylor Farms helps provide that, he said.

Taylor said his company’s investment provides the technology it needs to move into fresh fruit slicing.

“We look forward to working closely with Crunch Pak as we explore new ways to deliver an unmatched quality of fresh sliced fruit

products across a variety of channels,” he said.

Founded in 2000, Crunch Pak produces more than 1 billion apple slices annually at plants in Cashmere and New Jersey. Brands include Crunch Pak with Disney and Crunch Pak Organics.

Taylor Farms is a third-generation conventional and organic operation in the Salinas Valley, known as America’s Salad Bowl. The company is the world’s largest producer of fresh-cut vegetables, supplying bagged salads and freshly prepared meals to many of the largest grocery chains and restaurants in the U.S.

Taylor Farms employs 10,000 people with regional processing plants in Salinas, Tracy and Gonzales, Calif.; Yuma, Ariz.; Dallas, Texas; Colorado Springs, Colo.; Smyrna, Tenn.; Orlando, Fla.; Annapolis Junction, Mass.; Swedesboro, N.J.; Chicago, Ill.; Kent, Wash.; and San Miguel de Allende, Mexico.



Capital Press File

A wet spring has delayed Washington state’s asparagus harvest.

Wet spring delays Washington asparagus harvest

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

The Washington state asparagus harvest, delayed by unseasonably wet spring weather, began 10 days later than normal, said Gary Larsen, a Pasco, Wash., farmer and chairman of the Washington Asparagus Commission.

“Harvest is looking really good because we’ve had so much rain,” Larsen said. “As far as quality goes, it should be outstanding. Now we just have to get the sun to cooperate ... so we get more asparagus on the market.”

With the late start, Larsen expects yields to be down from last year, although it’s too early to forecast final numbers.

Some 40 to 50 Washington farmers grow 4,500 acres of asparagus, Larsen said. Those acres are planted to high-yielding hybrid varieties.

“Our 4,000 acres is roughly (equivalent to) 12,000 to 16,000 acres because of the yields we get off those fields now,” Larsen said.

The average yield is 5,000 to 6,000 pounds per acre. Asparagus prices are about \$58 per 28-pound box, according to the commission.

Larsen doesn’t expect insect pressures.

“I think it’s too cold for the bugs to be out,” he said.

Harvest typically ends June 10-15, depending on field temperatures and when the cherry harvest begins, Larsen said.

The state minimum wage increased to \$11 per hour, which affects growers, particularly during slower periods before harvest really kicks off, he said.

“We’re paying \$1.50 more per hour than what we were paying last year,” he said.

Larsen hopes to sell more Washington asparagus in-state and in the region.

“We’ve got Seattle, Portland and Spokane — we’ve got these big areas and it’s a shame to see other people ship into those areas when we’re so close,” he said. “When you’re at the grocery store, everybody look at those rubber bands. If it doesn’t say ‘Washington asparagus’ on it, it’s somebody else’s.”

Ecology holds coal company responsible for carbon in Asia

Farm Bureau criticizes requirement

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

A U.S. company must develop a plan to mitigate 100 percent of the net increase in greenhouse gases that would be released in Asia if it shipped coal from Columbia River docks in southwest Washington, the Department of Ecology said Friday.

Farm, labor and business leaders accused Ecology of stretching a law that authorizes the agency to evaluate how projects will affect the state’s environment.

“Decisions like this just send the wrong message about our trade and export policies and infrastructure, especially where one in four jobs is linked to trade. It’s unacceptable,” Washington Farm Bureau CEO John Stuhmiller said in a written statement.

Millennium Bulk Terminals-Longview proposes to export coal mined in Montana, Wyoming, Utah and Colorado. The coal would be transferred from trains to



Don Jenkins/Capital Press File

Opponents of a proposal to build a coal-export terminal along the Columbia River in southwest Washington hold signs during a hearing May 24, 2016, in Longview, Wash. The Washington Department of Ecology says the project would contribute to global warming and the company proposing it must develop a plan to keep from adding to the world’s emissions of greenhouse gases.

ships at a large industrial site was vacated by an aluminum company.

Ecology and Cowlitz County issued a long-awaited final report on the terminal’s anticipated environmental impacts. The report will guide 10 government agencies responsible for issuing the more than 20 permits the company must obtain.

The report estimates the

project would add 1.99 million metric tons of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere each year, mostly by inducing demand for coal in Asia.

The company could offset the increase by buying carbon credits or making on-site reductions in emissions, according to Ecology.

“The measures must achieve emission reductions that are real, permanent, en-

forceable (and) verifiable,” according to the report.

Ecology offered some ways to reduce emissions: Use electric vehicles for company cars, install charging stations for electric cars and encourage workers to carpool.

In response to efforts to contact Millennium Bulk Terminals President and CEO Bill Chapman, the company sent a press release.

“Today we are celebrating the completion of another strong step forward,” Chapman said in a written statement. “This independent state study shows we can achieve our goals to bring more family-wage jobs to Longview while meeting the high standards for environmental protection in Cowlitz County and Washington state.”

It was left to other groups to criticize Ecology’s demands.

The Farm Bureau has been a stronger backer of the project, saying it will stimulate rail and port improvements that will benefit exporters of farm products.

“It’s disheartening to watch this unfold and know that we could be doing so much more to increase our rail and export capacity.

We’re the most trade-dependent state in the nation, but our regulatory process continues to create barriers,” Stuhmiller said.

Keep Washington Competitive, a coalition of business groups, charged Ecology with overreaching by going beyond the boundaries of the State Environmental Policy Act.

Ecology cited an assortment of federal and state clean air laws and executive orders to justify requiring Millennium to offset the project’s net emissions.

The report also concluded that particulate matter from diesel-burning trains would increase cancer risks in a neighborhood along the rail line. Eight loaded and eight unloaded trains would leave the terminal each day, according to the report.

The Alliance for Northwest Jobs and Exports lashed out at the finding.

Ecology’s assertion “is seemingly an indictment against rail service across the state, which transports grain, lumber, Boeing aircraft fuselages, and the consumer products we rely on every day,” Alliance spokeswoman Marianna Parks said.

Washington state onion packer accused of sex harassment

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

GEORGE, Wash. — An onion-packing company, Horning Brothers LLC, and its foreman have been sued by the state attorney general for alleged sexual harassment of workers.

The civil action, filed in U.S. District Court in Spokane on April 25, accuses

foreman Hermilo Cruz of making unwanted sexual advances and harassing female employees since 2012 and the company of allowing the conduct and reprimanding, firing or not rehiring workers who reported it.

Horning Brothers could not be reached for comment. The company typically employs 15 people.

Horning Brothers and Cruz

are accused of multiple violations of Title VII of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Washington Law Against Discrimination.

Company policy allowed the conduct, and the company and Cruz retaliated against employees who reported it, the lawsuit alleges.

“Low-wage agricultural workers are part of a vulner-

able population with limited resources. They deserve to be heard,” Attorney General Bob Ferguson said in a news release.

“No woman should be forced to accept sexual harassment as a condition of her employment,” he said.

The AG’s investigation involved interviews with several witnesses and alleged victims and began last year after

a referral from the Northwest Justice Project.

Cruz is accused of pervasive sexual advances including overt sexual gestures, groping and requests for sex as a condition of continued employment.

The lawsuit seeks court orders to halt the illegal practices, damages for alleged victims and costs and fees for the state’s lawsuit.

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